

February 25, 2015 Public Hearing for "An Act Concerning English Language Learners"

Testimony of Bill Powers, PO Box 12, Windham, Connecticut 06280

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of the Act "to increase the time a student may spend in a program of education from thirty to sixty months" and "to require school districts to provide a program of bilingual education when there are six or more eligible students enrolled in a public school."

The content of my testimony today is the result of many years working as a public school teacher in Hartford and Windham. I speak to you on behalf students who because of their limited English proficiency have floundered and failed to meet expectations in classrooms with content presented in English. Clearly, 30 months is not enough time for most students in the process of learning English to meet learning expectations for classes requiring the use of higher levels of academic English. There is a significant difference between "academic language" and simple "conversational language" acquisition. Chamot and O'Malley (1994) concluded that academic language is "the language that is used by teachers and students for the purposes of acquiring new knowledge and skills... imparting new information, describing abstract ideas, and developing students' conceptual understanding."

Where there is inadequate time (30 months) for our students learning to speak and understand English in a meaningful way, they are not receiving proper instruction and are being deprived of equal education opportunity.

Students need to develop basic literacy skills in order to be successful not only in education, but also for gainful employment and full participation in democracy.

Language- minority children make up the fastest growing segment of school age children. For such children in Connecticut, their future is now in YOUR hands.